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ABSTRACT

During the period from 1949 to 1984, industry's share in the national economy of the Peoples' Republic of China rose from 30 percent to 60 percent. Despite raising literacy over the same period from 20 percent to over 75 percent, the Chinese educational system has failed to keep pace with the economy's rapidly expanding need for trained technicians, engineers, and scientists. In addition to failing to maintain a proper balance among different types of training, the system has also used teaching methods that discourage individual initiative and has denied any autonomous authority to educational institutions. To remedy these problems, China has adopted several reforms including making 9 years of schooling compulsory, restructuring secondary education to place greater emphasis on vocational and technical training, restructuring higher education to alter enrollment patterns and to allow postsecondary institutions adequate administrative authority, and improving curricula and teaching methods. The likelihood that these reforms will be successfully carried out is enhanced by the Chinese Communist Party's declaration that education is the highest priority, by the strength of the existing base of educational institutions, and by governmental commitments to increasing financial support for education at a rate greater than the growth rate of state revenues. (PGD)

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AN OVERVIEW OF CHINA'S ONGOING EDUCATION REFORM

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AN OVERVIEW OF CHINA'S ONGOING EDUCATION REFORM

In May of 1985, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party published the "Decision on Reforming the Education System" which marked the beginning of a new stage in the transformation of China's education system. Why does China need an education reform? How is the education reform going on? What are the prospects of the education reform? This paper will be dealing with the background, tasks, and prospects of the ongoing education reform of China.

1. Education Reform is Indispensable to China's Modernization

China, a developing country with a population of more than one billion, has decided to quadruple its 1980 total industrial and agricultural output value by the end of this century, and approach the level of the developed countries by the end of the 2040s. The achievement of these goals depends largely on the development of science and technology. Therefore, the key to the success of China's socialist modernization lies in developing intellectual resources and rapidly raising the entire nation's cultural, scientific, and technological levels. Judging from the actual needs of China's economic construction, the educational departments are faced with extremely arduous and urgent tasks.

Industry occupies the dominant position in China's economy as its proportion in the national economy increased from 30 percent in 1949 to 60 percent in 1984. Modernizing the technology and management of enterprises and improving their economic efficiency are the basic conditions for a vigorous economy.

According to a 10 percent sample survey in the third national census in 1982, workers and staff members with junior middle school education, or lower, account for 78 percent of the total labour force in the industrial sector. Those with little or no education make up 7.9 percent. Senior middle school graduates make up only 20.4 percent, and college graduates only 1.6 percent. While looking at an eight-graded technical scale, with the first grade being the lowest and the eighth the highest, workers of the first three grades make up 71 percent, 23 percent in the fourth to sixth grades and only 2 percent in the seventh and eighth grades. In the state-owned enterprises, there are only 1.21 million engineers and technicians, accounting for only 3.45 percent of the total labour force. In coal, textile, and building materials enterprises, technicians represent less than 2 percent of the labour force, and the figure is even smaller in collectively owned enterprises.

In this respect, China is lagging far behind some developed countries and even behind some other developing countries. In a world where the technical revolution is on the upswing, unless China develops its education, it would be impossible to invigorate the economy.

Feeding the one billion Chinese people has been and will remain a problem of paramount importance for a long time to come. "No food--no political stability" has always been the political reality in China. As agricultural production has picked up in recent years, the annual per-capita amount of food grain is now about 400 kilogrammes. Although China now produces enough food for its population, it still has a long way to go before it can provide its people with 1,000 kilgrammes of grain per capita a year, as can some developed countries at present. China's dis-

advantages is that its enormous population is living on limited farmland. An average Chinese has only 0.11 hectare of land, accounting for about 40 percent of the world average. China's population is nearly five times that of the United States, but it has less than one-seventh of the United States' farmland. What is more, China has only 100 million hectares of reclaimable land. Because of requisition of land for construction in the cities and countryside, farmland has shrunk by 25 percent since the founding of New China in 1949.

China cannot count on any other country to feed its one billion mouths. Such being the case, the only way out for China is to rely on itself and on science and technology to raise the per-hectare yield of grain. But for every 10,000 rural residents, there are no more than four agro-technicians. The peasants' educational and technical levels are quite low, and at least 80 million young and middle-aged farmers have received little or no education at all.

The reform of China's economic structure and the emergence of many economic forms have also placed new demands on education. In 1984, China had about 6 million rural enterprises staffed with 60 million people that turned out about 143.3 billion yuan in output value. More and more surplus rural labourers will be leaving their farmland to work in factories in their hometown. In recent years, collective and private economies in the cities also have been forging ahead. They need new technology, information and advanced management expertise, which can be obtained only through the development of various forms of education.

The development of culture and ethics is an important characteristic of socialism, which finds expression in advanced education, science, and

the people's political consciousness and moral character. All the above aspects are related to education. The 1982 national census showed that China has 235 million illiterate or semi-literate people, a serious handicap to the development of socialist culture and ethics. In some rural areas, the illiteracy rate is even higher and some superstitious activities that had disappeared after the founding of New China in 1949 have resurfaced.

In sum, the educational reform is indispensable to the building of China's material wealth and socialist ethics and culture.

2. Current Problems of China's Education System

China's education has progressed rapidly and with great success since its founding in 1949. The country has trained more than 400 million primary school graduates, and more than 250 million junior middle school graduates, thus reducing the illiteracy rate from 80 percent in the early post-liberation years to 23.5 percent of the total population. During this period institutes of higher learning and secondary technical schools turned out more than 16 million junior and senior professionals, many of whom have become the backbone of China's socialist construction today.

However, with the interference of "leftist" thinking that held sway for years, especially the damage brout on by the "cultural revolution" from 1966 to 1976, China's education did not develop as well as it should have, and education today falls far short of the needs of China's economy, science, and technology, and socialist construction as demonstrated in the following respects:

1) A recent national investigation indicated that trained talent does not meet the needs of society.

Take Shanghai for example, it is a nationally famous industrial city and economic center and its higher education is well developed. However, two talent surveys in the city showed that in the coming few years universities and colleges will only be able to provide employers with half the required numbers of employees. In some provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities with less developed education, the gap is even wider.

2) China's education system is so irrationally structured that it cannot satisfy the needs of the economic and technology boom.

Because of the interference of the "leftist" thinking, which overlooked the role of financial and management professionals in economic development, and ignored the establishment of a legal system, the institutes of higher education in China have also for quite some time overlooked the training of personnel in these fields. The two-to-three-year system of colleges for professional training was also neglected. As a result, higher education is plagued by an imbalance in the composition of disciplines. And also, China's secondary technical education has not been developed as it should. This lopsided development has resulted in the disproportionate ration of engineers with college degrees to technicians educated in secondary technical schools. It is a grave waste of talent, with many university graduates doing work that could be done by the secondary technical school graduates. Vocational training in China's secondary schools is rather weak. Though vocational and technical has been improved in recent years, the number of students in these schools represents less than 10 percent of the total number of secondary school students. The ratio is still so low that every year more than one million senior middle school graduates and about six million junior middle school graduates get neither the chance for further training, nor the needed

skills when they enter society.

3) Because of the traditional spoon-fed method of teaching in China, students lack the ability to think and study independently. The rote teaching method and lack of field work compel the students to only listen to what they are told, leaving them no leeway to think, let alone to doubt what are taught. Their examinations require the same content and the same answers, encouraging students to seek high marks, rather than to make creative or enterprising efforts. All these fail, to varying extents, to keep pace with the economic, social, scientific and cultural developments taking place in China today.

4) In education administration, generally speaking, the government departments concerned have exercised too much rigid control over schools, especially universities and colleges, in the areas of personnel affairs, funding, student enrolment and job assignment, capital construction and academic exchanges with foreign schools, leaving school administration no say in all these matters. In the meantime, the government education authorities have failed to examine closely overall arrangements, with the result that the scale, speed and structure of China's education, as well as content and teaching methodo logy could not keep in line with the development of its economy, science and technology. Furthermore, tight controls dampened the enthusiasm of local governments to run their own schools.

In conclusion, education reform in China is inevitable. Without reform, China's education would fail to keep pace with the rapid development of its economy, science and technology.

3. Tasks Set for Educational Reform

Proceeding from the background and problems of China's current education system, China will fulfil the following tasks in its educational reform so as to make education serve its economic, scientific, and technological developments:

1) Entrusting local governments with the responsibility of developing elementary education and gradually introducing a 9-year compulsory education schedule.

The 9-year compulsory plan will be implemented according to local conditions. The educational levels in various parts of China can be roughly divided into three categories.

First are the cities, the coastal provinces and a few inland areas which are economically developed and which make up one-fourth of China's total population. Quite a number of them have already introduced universal junior middle school education and those that haven't are expected to do the same around 1990.

The second level of education takes place in the towns and rural areas with moderate economic development and half of the nation's total population. Under the new education reform, they will first universalize primary school education and simultaneously create conditions to universalize regular junior middle school or vocational and technical education around 1995.

Third are the economically backward areas that contain one-fourth of China's population. Along with their economic development, they will be able to universalize elementary education by various forms and to different extents. The state will do its best to assist these areas with their educational development.

While introducing a 9-year compulsory education system, great efforts

will also be made to develop pre-school education and special education for the blind, deaf-mute and disabled, and for mentally handicapped children.

2) Readjusting the structure of secondary school education and devoting great effort to the further development of vocational and technical schools.

China's modernization not only needs high-level scientists and technologiste but also calls for millions of well-educated middle and low-level technicians, managerial personnel, skilled workers and other trained people for both urbam and rural construction. In the near future some junior middle school graduates will proceed to regular senior middle schools and some will enter vocational or technical schools (equivalent to senior middle school level). Some of these senior middle school graduates will proceed to universities or colleges while others will receive training in polytechnic colleges. Those who have received post-primary-school vocational or technical training may work or continue study, and those who are not admitted by regular senior middle schools, colleges or vocational and technical schools must receive a short-term vocational or technical training before being employed.

Efforts will be made to fully utilize existing secondary vocational and technical schools. enrollment will be increased, and plans will be made to gradually turn a number regular senior middle schools into vocational middle schools or set up vocational training classes in some regular senior middle schools. In addition, a number of new secondary vocational and technical schools will be built. It is planned to bring the enrolment of secondary vocational and technical schools up to that of regular senior middle schools in the next five years, in an effort to change the illogical structure of the current secondary school system. Simultaneous efforts will be made to de-

velop polytechnic colleges that will give priority to secondary vocational and technical school graduates and on-the-job training for qulified workers. This will help set up, step by step, a vocational and technical educational system that ranges from elementary to higher-level training, involves all trades, is well balaced and also links up with regular school education.

To ensure the smooth progress in the secondary school system, China's labour and personnel system will be reformed in line with the principle of "training first, employment second."

3) Changing the plan of enrolment and the job-assignment system of the institutes of higher learning; restructuring higher education; and enlarging administrative powers for universities and colleges.

The key to restructuring higher education is to change the current administrative system under which the government exercises excessive control over universities and colleges. Under the unified guidance of the government's educational policy and plans, universities and colleges will be granted more decision-making powers and will be encouraged to strengthen their ties with production, scientific research and all quarters of society. This measure will rekindle their enthusiasm and capacity to orient their work to the needs of the country's economic and social development. The main tasks of these particular reforms include: the abolishment of the current practice of enrolling all students according to state quotas, and state job assignment for all university and college graduates.

Instead, the following methods will be introduced: First, students will be enrolled according to state plan. Under the guidance of the state plan, they will be assigned, upon graduation, with due consideration to their wishes, the schools' recommendations and the employers' preferences. To

ensure that the border regions and production units with tough working conditions are able to employ some university and college graduates, a certain percentage of students will be recruited directly for these areas, and graduates who are assigned to work in these areas will get better pay.

The second method is that schools are entrusted by other units with the training of students. This method, proved to be effective over the last couple of years, should be gradually popularized, making it an important aspect in the state enrolment plan. According to contracts, the units will pay a certain amount of training fees, and the students will work in these units after graduation.

The third method is to admit, outside the state plan, some students who provide for their own expenses. Such students will have to pay for their tuition fees and other expenses. After graduation they may ask the schools to recommend them for jobs or seek jobs on their own.

Nevertheless, all students will have to pass entrance examinations before admission to colleges and universities.

The structure of higher education will be readjusted to meet the needs of China's economic construction, social development, and scientific and technological progress. Efforts will be made to speed up the development of business and economics studies, political science, law and management. Emphasis will also be put on developing professional training courses in colleges and universities.

On the premise that universities and colleges carry out the state's policies, decrees, and plans, they will also have the right to train students entrusted to them by other establishments, and admit outside the state plan, students who provide their own expenses; to readjust the

service goals of their specialities, decide on teaching methods and syllabus, and compile and choose teaching materials; to accept projects from or cooperate with other social establishments for scientfic research and technological development or set up team-teaching projects dealing with scientific research and production. The college and university administration will also suggest appointments and removals of college vice-presidents and officials at various levels; to plan the use of capital investment and funds allocated by the state, and to develop international acafemic exchanges by using local funds.

The management system of higher education will also have to be reformed. In 1984, there were 902 regular institutes of higher learning in China. Thirty-six were directly administered by the Ministry of Education, 250 were attached to 49 ministries and commissions under the State Council, and the remainder were governed by the various provincial, autonomous regional and municipal authorities. One of the drawbacks in this management system is that the Ministry of Education, as a government organization, found it hard to co-ordinate all that was involved in the enrolment, job assignment, teaching, management and development of universities and colleges which were not under its direct charge but were under the management of other ministries or commissions and of various provincial, autonomous regional and municipal authorities. In view of this, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, at the proposal of the Party Central Committee, adpted a decision in June, 1985 to abolish the Ministry of Education and establish the State Educational Commission under the leadership of the State Council. The commission is responsible for formulating the guiding principles of education, planning the progress of

of educational undertakings, coordinating the educational work of different departments, and arranging and guiding the educational reform in a unified way. Compared with the former Ministry of Education, the State Educational Commission has increased administrative scope and power, and the focus of its work will gradually be shifted from stressing micro-management to macro-management.

4) The reform will also take a hard look at China's current teaching materials and methodology.

Efforts must made to experiment with progressive teaching methods in the institutes of higher learning, in order to broaden the field of special studies, simplify and update current teaching materials, increase practical courses, reduce required courses, introduce credit and double-degree systems and allow more time for independent study, and carry out work-study programmes.

Professors and associate professors who bear heavy teaching loads will be granted sabbaticals every five years for study, scientific research or academic exchanges. Efforts also will be made to improve teaching conditions, such as updating materials and replenishing laboratories and libraries.

After adequate preparations, teaching plans for secondary and primary schools will also be readjusted. This will involve adjustments of curriculum, teaching materials teaching methods and examination system. This is intended to improve China's basic education, reduce the burden on students, stimulate their initiative for study and develop their intelligence and ability. It is high time that China begins training a new generation of creative and independent minds.

4. Prospects of the Educational Reform

According to the goal set for China's educational reforms, all workers and staff living in China's coastal areas, inland cities and moderately developed areas, which have a combined population of 300 to 400 million, will receive a compulsory or vocational education by the mid-1990s. It is expected that 5 percent of these people will go on to finish college. The attainment of that goal will mean a solid intellectual foundation for China.

According to the reform plan, by the end of this century China's institutes of higher education will offer diverse, yet properly proportioned programs, which will conform with the nation's economic capabilities. Through the implementation of such a program, China will ultimately have the capacity to train specialists, scientists and technicians, who will eventually contribute major theoretical bases and pratical solusions to problems arising from China's modernization.

However, China faces an onslaught of problems in the process of reforming its educational system. Difficulties such as inadequate funding and a shortage of qualified teachers are not insurmountable. That seemingly impossible hurdles can be overcome has been borne out since the publication last May of the Decision on the Reform of the Educational System, and by the achievements recorded by exprimental education units.

1) Education has been placed high on agenda by the Party and the government.

In 1982, at its 12th National Congress, the Chinese Communist Party in unprecedented move designated education as a critical facet of China's economic construction. In his speech at the National Educational Confer-

ence on May 19, 1985, Deng Xiaoping, while also emphasizing education's strategic significance, volunteered to be a "rear-service minister", for and support all those engaged in education, science and technology. Soon after the Conference, Hu yaobang, general secretary of the CPC Central committee, called on government officials to strengthen local educational work. In response to this call, 3000 cadres left Beijing for different parts of the country to train more qualified middle and primary school teachers.

To implement the "Decision on Educational Reform" almost all provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have held or are preparing to discuss their own educational changes. At the meetings so far, top local leaders, together with representatives of all circles, have mapped out programs for updating their area's educational undertakings and have found a variety of solutions to the crucial problems of money and teachers.

2) Foundation and potential of the education reform

China's current educational base serves as an important guarantee for the implementation of the ongoing educational reforms. Throughout the whole China, where 95.3 percent of school-age children attend school, there are now about 860,000 primary schools, 104,000 regular middle schools, secondary technical schools, and vocational schools, with a total enrolment of 49 million students; and about 1,000 colleges and universities, with 1.5 million students.

In addition, adult education has also taken shape, and now includes 1,000 institutes of higher learning, 48,000 secondary schools and 280,000 primary schools. Manning all of the institutes are 9 million teachers and 3 million staff workers.

According to the statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the world's average ratio of college teachers to students is 1:12. In China that ratio is now 1:4.6. Since China's teaching and management systems are different, there are factors in China which are incomparable with those in other countries. But on the whole, the ratio of teachers to students in China is too high. Despite this high percentage of teachers, Chinese colleges and universities do have considerable potential waiting to be tapped.

3) New channels for funding the education

From 1950 to 1983, the state allocated 6.6 percent of its expenditures for developing its education. Between 1976 and 1984, the State outlays for education increased 14.2 percent a year and contributed significantly to the restoration and development of education in China. Funding shortages, however, still remain a problem in developing the educational undertakings.

In an effort to effect radical changes in education, the Decision on Educational Reform stipulated that within a certain period to come, central and local government allocations for education should increase faster than the state's current revenues, while average per-student expenditures will gradually increase.

The Decision also explicitly stipulated that local governments use a balanced proportion of their reserves for education, and that township governments should use a majority of their revenues for education. Local governments, the Decision says, are then allowed to levy extra charges for education. In addition, local governments should encourage state-owned enterprise, public organizations and individuals to run schools. Units, collectives and individuals including the peasants are urged to donate money to their local schools.

Education reforms also have opened up new financial sources for institutes of higher learning and vast vistas for better results from investment. According to the stipulations of the Decision, apart from ministries and commissions under the State Council, provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions, China's major cities are also urged to run colleges and universities. In recent years, 82 vocational schools that provide short-term courses for non-subsidized day students who are expected to find jobs by themselves after graduation, have been opened in China. Out of those 82 schools, 73 have been financed by the nation's key cities.

The Decision also endorsed the "trial method", practised for years by some colleges and universities, whereby the colleges and universities that have fulfiled the state quotas, are allowed to enrol and train students for a future employer in return for a certain amount of training fees. In 1983, institutes of higher learning in China trained 3,000 students entrusted by other establishments. In 1985, the number of suchstudents increased to 58,000 almost 10 percent of the state enrolment quotas.

In conclusion, proceeding from the background, current problems of the education system, the tasks set for the current education reform, and the foundation, potential, and new funding channels for China's educational undertakings, China's ongoing education reform holds bright prospects.